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LETTER DATED 26 MAY 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF GEORGIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

Allow me once again to bring to your attention the recent tragic events that have taken place in the Gali region of Abkhazia, Georgia.

Already-concluded peace agreements, decisions taken by the Security Council and by other international and regional organizations have practically been brought to nothing.

Undermined are the efforts of the United Nations, yearning to intensify the peace negotiations through the Geneva process and to reinforce the monitoring control system on the ground.

All these efforts have run up against a well-organized force, which had painstakingly worked to prepare a fertile soil for destabilization.

Operations carried out by the armed Abkhaz units, intending ostensibly to crack down on alleged bandits, were followed by relentless killings, hostage-taking and raids against innocent civilians.

The returnees were confronted by the inevitability of putting up their own defence, which had intensified the clashes.

The impunity assumed greater dimensions after the United Nations observers had been compelled to reduce their activities.

In April 1998, the situation in the Gali region became especially tense. On 19 and 20 May 1998, armed with heavy armaments and artillery, the Abkhaz military units accomplished massive attacks on the villages of the region, killing innocent civilians and setting on fire houses that had been restored with the help of international humanitarian organizations.

In the face of these developments, on 22 May 1998, under the chairmanship of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Liviu Bota, the meeting of the Coordinating Council was held in Tbilisi, where the Georgian and Abkhaz sides signed an agreement on a ceasefire.

However, on 22 to 23 May, the Abkhaz side made one more attempt to introduce fresh armed units and heavy armament into the Gali region. At that point, the interference of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) peacekeepers averted the massacre of the Georgian population.

The Government of Georgia has made every effort and is doing everything possible to localize the conflict.

On 24 May 1998, the Special Representative of the President of Georgia on the issues related to Abkhazia met with Mr. Vladislav Ardzinba in Sukhumi. The Protocol on the Cessation of Military Operations was signed as a result.

Despite the steps taken, on 24 May 1998, the Abkhaz separatists carried out a large-scale military operation in the security zone, using grenade launchers, artillery and heavy armaments, targeting civilians and their houses.

Hundreds of civilians are reported dead and the villages of the Gali region levelled to earth. The renewed ethnic cleansing has already prompted the exodus of thousands of people. By means of armed repression the separatists have accomplished their plans: they have expelled more than 30,000 returnees, whose return to their homes had been brought about by the efforts and persistence of international organizations. The Geneva process is now stalled and the issue of the functioning of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) is under question.

Despite the tireless efforts of the world forum, the situation has critically deteriorated. As I already mentioned, the Georgian population is subjected to ethnic cleansing and the CIS peacekeepers have so far been unable to prevent the carnage.

The results of the ethnic cleansing would have been far more serious if not for the protection units of the local population, who have presented resistance to the raiders and have saved the population from massive extermination.

Although both sides have signed the Protocol on the Cessation of Military Operations, effective 6 a.m., 26 May 1998, the punitive operation has not yet been stopped. We believe that the current events, if not handled with great care and attention, are fraught with the most serious consequences for the whole Caucasian region.

The international community must make it clear that it will not tolerate the mass murder of innocent civilians and the gross violations of human rights. We firmly believe that the Security Council should urgently make a decision with regard to the resettlement of recently expelled returnees and their humanitarian assistance.

We are confident that the time has come to acknowledge that this conflict may threaten international peace and security, which will allow us to act in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

May I ask your kind assistance in having the present letter circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Peter CHKHEIDZE
Ambassador
Permanent Representative